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ABSTRACT

Rural and urban elementary schools implemented collaborative consultation to serve special education students. In the rural school, the special education teacher spends 4 days per week in the classrooms. She spends Wednesdays and 1 week out of 5 testing, writing IEPs, planning, and completing paperwork. The principal, instructional assistant, TAG teacher, speech and language teacher, itinerant consultant, and most classroom teachers are involved in the collaborative consultation. Before implementing collaborative consultation, team members spent a year or more gathering information through conferences, visitations, and discussions. In the urban school, the resource room teacher, Chapter-1 teacher, instructional assistants, speech and language teacher, principal, and classroom teachers reviewed information on collaborative consultation over a semester and developed guidelines. They started in reading classes and continued inservice training and regular meetings. Program evaluations over several years showed many strengths but also concerns about curriculum adaptation and planning time. Collaborative consultation requires close teamwork, extensive planning, specific consulting skills, flexibility, administrator support, and sufficient allocation of time for planning and implementation. (KS)

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COLLABORATIVE CONSULTATION IN A RURAL SCHOOL

Introduction

My introduction to special education began in 1980 with a rural school of one hundred students in grade K-9. I quickly discovered that the idealistic vision of schools portrayed in college education courses and the reality of a tiny school district had little in common with each other. There was no counselor, special education director, psychologist or speech teacher. I soon found, however, ways to acquire resources needed to service special education students. We hired an itinerant speech teacher who came weekly. We found a volunteer who had a degree in counseling and we organized a consortium with three other small district to serve our SED population and share a nurse. I found colleges who were willing to do free assessments and even provide some tutoring. Our local county educational service district also helped with migrant education, psychological assessments and information.

I moved on to a somewhat larger district with a school which had approximately 350 students in grades K-6. It was during the nine years I spent in this rural school that I really gained first-hand experience as an educator in special education. I was given the title of coordinator of special education but "jack of all trades" would have been more appropriate. This position gave me the opportunity to be responsible for all federal and state regulations (paperwork), to be involved in state inservice meetings, to access regional support programs, run the Chapter One program, and be in charge of other support personnel which included, a part time speech person, an intervention teacher, a contracted occupational therapist, a part time counselor another special education teacher and instructional assistants. It also gave me the opportunity to develop a special education program I was proud of that included consulting, team teaching, inclusion, classroom modifications, a prereferral team and a multi-disciplinary team.

Purpose of Presentation

The purpose of this presentation is to describe how two special education teacher and other school personnel implemented and maintained a collaborative consultation program (Glenn, 1994). In addition to its important descriptive contribution, this presentation will examine the implications this study has for better understanding collaborative consultation and its successful implementation and maintenance in other rural school settings. Due to the cooperative nature of

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collaborative consultation, this presentation will be of interest to not only special educators but to practitioners, other specialists, regular educators and school administrators.

Brief Review of the Literature

The field of special education is full of controversy. There is little agreement over the meaning of terms such as inclusion, mainstreaming, regular education initiative, least restrictive environment and collaborative consultation. Since these terms are used to express writers points of view it is hard for people in the field to agree on what is happening and what should be happening in special education. There is also disagreement over the role of the special educator, the administrator and other staff members in providing adequate services to special education students (Evans, 1990; Jenkins & Leicester, 1992; McGrady, 1985; Pugach & Johnson, 1989).

Collaborative Consultation

Although the literature describing characteristics of consultants and consultant models is abundant, there is a lack of consensus about collaborative consulting. Some believe collaborative consultation should be used for prereferral interventions (Evans, 1990; Johnson & Pugach, 1991; Yocum, 1990). Others think co-teaching is the most important part of collaborative consulting (Friend & Cook, 1992b). Still others emphasize the importance of a team approach and making sure those involved accept responsibility for the decision making and implementation (Huefner,1988; Pugach & Johnson, 1990).

An extensive review of the literature did not discover a comprehensive definition of collaborative consultation. I combined, therefore, aspects of collaborative consultation which were espoused by more than one author and the characteristics which were common to all consulting models. The components included: (1) voluntary participation,(2) problem solving,(3) working together for a common goal (West & Idol, 1987), (4) shared responsibility for the student (Friend & Cook, 1992a), (5) prereferral teams (Johnson & Pugach, 1991),(6) IEP's development include the classroom teacher (Idol, et al., 1986), (7) the special education teacher and classroom teacher do lesson planning and teaching together (Friend & Cook, 1992b; Self, Benning, Marston, & Magnusson, 1991), (8) specialists are in the classroom most of the time (Friend & Cook, 1992a & b), (9) regular meetings between the specialists and classroom teacher (Friend & Cook, 1992a & b), and (10) minimal pull-out (Friend & Cook, 1992a & b). By combining these ten descriptors, I developed a working definition used for this study.

The remainder of this paper will deal with the my observations of approaches to collaborative consultation in two schools, one rural and the other urban, with an analysis of their similarities and differences.

K School

K School is located in a rural area in Oregon at the foot of Mt. Hood. K School is one of five schools in the district. Its initial enrollment of 220 students has climbed to nearly to 400. The school is located in an upper middle class area that includes commuters to Portland, farmers and nurserymen.

Program Description

K Schools collaborative consultation is arranged in the following way. The year has been broken up into five week blocks. During four of those weeks, Jane, the special education teacher, goes into the classrooms four days a week. She spends Wednesdays and one week out of five in her office doing testing, writing IEPs, planning for the next theme she will be teaching and attempting to complete paperwork. Other specialists involved in working in the regular classroom are Joan, a speech/language teacher who spends time in the classrooms two days a week, Carol, a TAG teacher; and Penny, a district consultant. This team of specialists alternate the five week block between primary grades and upper grades.

Many people on the staff have been involved with collaborative consultation. These people include Don, the school principal; Linda, the instructional assistant; Carol, the TAG teacher; Joan, the speech/language teacher; Penny, the itinerant consultant; most classroom teachers; and Jane, the special education teacher. I was able to observe Jane in a variety of settings which included regular classrooms, staff meetings, consultation meetings, meetings with individual staff members and in personal interviews in her office and by phone.

Jane's teaching day is only a piece of collaborative consultation at K School. Another important piece is the collaborative consultation meeting which takes place on Wednesday of the fifth week. Roving substitutes are hired to cover for the classroom teachers and meetings are scheduled so that specialists can meet with each grade level twice during the day.

Other meetings included the entire staff discussing how inclusion is going and changes they would like to see. Shorter meetings in classrooms between different grade levels and individual teachers were also held. There were also quickly meetings over lunch, in the hall or at the back of the classrooms.

Collaborative consultation started at K School about five years ago (just in Carol's room) because Carol, the TAG teacher, didn't like her kids being pulled out. About two and a half years ago they started talking about doing it in the whole school. They had some inservice meetings and sent people to special education conferences. Last year she and Joan, the speech/language teacher set up centers in the library for each class to use. This year they just decided to dive in.

When Jane was asked what was needed in a good inclusion model, she offered with several ideas. She believes those involved need to go to conferences, observe other schools and continue to learn. As a specialist she felt rapport with teachers was very

important. Both the teachers and specialists had to be willing to give and take. She considered time for planning and scheduling as critical. She also mentioned that administrative support has helped and being able to work cooperatively with Joan, the speech/language teacher and Carol, the TAG teacher, has made an important contribution to the quality of the services. In addition, she thinks special education teachers need to be flexible, understanding, patience, creative, know how to make modifications, be willing to give extra time, and have good teaching skills." One of her biggest concerns is that "IEP kids don't fall through the cracks and that all kids have a chance to be successful."

At the end of the school year the staff met to discuss collaborative consultation. Jane felt she received a lot of support and positive reinforcement about working in classrooms. Teachers had a better attitude towards special needs students and were willing to try this approach for another year with some moderate changes. One change was that Jane will be checking in once a week for about fifteen minutes into those classrooms where she is not working. Other concerns about math, speech and meeting IEP goals are still being resolved.

Collaborative consultation is only a year old at K School. The staff still feels there are things to work out. However, they have come up with some interesting solutions. It is obvious that at K School collaborative consultation is a team effort that has been supported by lots of enthusiasm from everyone

S School

Another school I observed was S School which is located in low income area of a large city and is a part of a middle size school district. It is an older school that was built thirty years ago in a bungalow style. S School has been involved in collaborative consultation for three years. Those involved in making it work are the resource room teacher, the Chapter One teacher, their instructional assistants, the speech/language teacher, the principal and the classroom teachers.
After reviewing the model and the information on collaborative consultation, the S staff listed their own strengths and concerns and prioritized what they felt they should work on first. They met about five times that spring and set up some guidelines. Judy, the special education teacher, said, "We designed it month by month." At each meeting Judy brought in new information. For example, she presented Lorna Idol's book and collaborative consultation model and shared the bibliography from the consulting teacher project (Idol, 1983). She encouraged the teachers to focus on reading and they came up with a way of combining the fourth, fifth and sixth grade reading classes and training the entire staff.

By fall they had a plan and a name, they called it SUCCESS (S Utilizes Collaboration of Colleagues in Educationally Successful Settings). They continued to meet regularly throughout the 1989-1990 school year to discuss how it was working and brought in guest speakers. The minutes of the September meeting showed they started slowly at first with only 3rd-4th reading groups, then 5th-6th reading. October's meeting brought a review of SUCCESS, a speaker on prereferral teams, a

discussion on writing IEPs, special education forms and procedures, and use of instructional assistants. In November, a School Instructional Adaptation Team was formed to help teachers design academic and behavioral adaptations that provided students opportunities to succeed. At the December meeting they discussed attending an inservice meeting in February and requests received from other schools to observe their program. They also spent a great deal of time discussing goals at Sacramento, things that were helping and hindering, and strengths and weaknesses. In April they talked about next year, Chapter One money and pressure from the district to end homogeneous grouping for reading.

The final meeting of the year in May was used to go over the survey the staff had completed. Staff had reported positively on improvement in student self esteem, and support from the resource room. There were mixed results when they were asked about meeting IEP needs, but all agreed they better understood their responsibilities since they had to help write IEPs. The prereferral team received mixed reviews as some teachers had not used it and others were not sure it had helped. The question about planning time received the most comments and negative responses. People felt like they needed more planning time, they needed to meet more often, release time would be helpful and some coverage when they had meetings to attend would be greatly appreciated. Chapter One concerns, elimination of retentions by the district, and setting up a meeting with the district administrators to share their model were also discussed.

After the first year they didn't meet very often as they felt like they had already worked out many of the problems. At the end of the second year, the SUCCESS team prepared an extensive year end report which identified twelve strengths of the program. These strengths included: meeting the needs of new students, the CARE team (prereferral team), the MDT Team (multi-disciplinary team), Reading, Chapter One, the language/reading program being used for students with learning difficulties, math, IEPs written as a team, report cards, curriculum and behavioral collaboration and the belief that "gray area" kids were having their needs met. They still had concerns, however, with curriculum adaptation and planning time. They started the 1991-1992 school year with a Building Improvement Plan and a building site committee which incorporated many of the goals of SUCCESS. The building improvement plan focused on the following special education issues; planning, curriculum adaptation, use of instructional assistants, 5-7 early release days for planning, meeting individual needs, self esteem, and continuing the SUCCESS plan.

When I interviewed Judy in the spring of 1992, she expressed concerns about staff cuts due to budget problems. She lamented, "We are not where we thought we would be in three years. A piece of it is planning time. Regular teachers are not buying into it. We haven't even met this year, we will have to take time later this spring to look at where we are going."

S School appears to be at a different stage in their development of collaborative consultation. Their program appears to be going through less change, the staff seems more settled with the concept and also more sure of themselves. Both schools seem very committed to students and appear to be doing an excellent job of meeting special needs with limited resources. However, concerns about budget cuts definitely effected Judy and the rest of the staff's enthusiasm at S School.

Common Themes

An analysis of the data gathered from visits and interviews, coupled with my own professional experiences with collaborative consultation, suggest five common themes about collaborative consultation.

1. Making the change to a collaborative consultation approach and then maintaining it requires close teamwork. At both schools, the special education teachers were part of a team that implemented the change to collaborative consultation. Notes from these meetings indicate a wide variety of staff was involved which included the principal, the speech/language teacher, PE specialist, special education teachers, an instructional assistant and several classroom teachers.

At K school the initial approach to collaborative consultation was different from S school. Each school set up their initial planning teams differently, but they both spent time increasing knowledge at the preplanning stage. Implementation meetings were held between specialists and the principal. The K School planning team gave staff time to process change by spending an entire year talking about inclusion, increasing knowledge about collaborative consultation and then at the end of that year, modeling the use of centers developed by the special education teacher and speech/language teacher. The main focus on teamwork at K School came during the maintenance of consultation.

An advantage both schools had was that the principal was part of the team. The active support of school administrators for the change to collaborative consultation greatly increased its chance of succeeding even though the way in which the two principals showed support for the change varied (Fullan, 1991). Don, the principal of K School, actively observed other schools, attended workshops, participated in presentations, and gave teachers release time to attend workshops and visit other schools. Linda, the principal K School, quietly supported Judy, the special education teacher. She attended all planning meetings, allowed for release time and encouraged Judy to share information. Utilizing a team comprised of all the stakeholders to implement and maintain a collaborative consultation approach increases the likelihood it will be successful.

2. Planning is the single most important ingredient in making collaborative consultation work. Planning must accompany all phases of collaborative consultation such as the implementation, maintenance and evaluation phases. Both schools started planning long before collaborative consultation began. At the beginning teams at both schools met to brainstorm and develop a plan for

implementation. S School did it at potlucks, while K School worked as a team of specialists with the principal. During maintenance of collaborative consultation, meetings were held to evaluate the program and plan for the next stage. K School met to develop thematic units, write lesson plans and develop schedules while the S School SUCCESS team met during the first year to evaluate progress and share information. Both schools held end of the year evaluation meetings where improvements for next year were developed. Other kinds of planning at both schools involved IEP meetings with parents, multi-disciplinary team meetings, scheduling meetings, parent conferences, ongoing inservice meetings and the usual daily lesson planning.

3. The special education teachers observed had more responsibility than classroom teachers and displayed specific actions and skills that helped in consulting. One of the most time consuming responsibilities is evaluation. Jane expressed a great deal of frustration about never getting caught up with testing even though both special education teachers had extra preparation time.

Certain qualities were common to these two special education teachers. They appeared calm, relaxed, positive with others and soft spoken, in spite of always feeling behind. Both were good communicators who spent a lot of time talking informally with teachers and guiding discussions during planning meetings. They both did a good job of communicating expectations to students. In addition, they provided leadership for the collaborative consultation approach.

One of the greatest strengths both teachers had was their organizational skills. Both were involved in a wide variety of activities each day which they managed quite well. Going from classroom to classroom and doing something different in each one requires a great deal of flexibility, organization and preparation.

Jane and Judy also showed a lot of flexibility in working with teachers as they willingly did something different for each grade level or teacher. Jane was teaching research in three classes as well as doing centers for two others. She had just completed making pop-up books with two primary classes and had studied oceanography with another. They were always positive with both the staff and students and I never heard either one make any negative comment about staff or administration.

Lest you think these two are clones, please be assured that they were not exactly alike. Judy was far more outgoing than Jane. But both teachers displayed many of the characteristics mentioned in the literature that were beneficial to special education teachers (Ramsey et al., 1991). They had a basic knowledge of special education and its history. They were able to identify handicapping conditions and do the assessments necessary to identify those that were eligible and write Individualized Education Plans. Each teacher possessed a variety of teaching strategies and knowledge of instructional content.

4. There is more than one way to do collaborative consultation and schools can adapt their programs to fit the needs of their students and teachers. Neither school had fully implemented the ten descriptors used to define collaborative consultation although K School had implemented all ten to some degree. Of the ten descriptors, K School had fully implemented six: shared responsibility for students, two or more coequal parties working together, lesson planning together, regular meetings, specialist working in the classroom and minimal pullout.

Collaborative consultation at S School was completely different from K School. Although S School had also implemented to some extent, all of the ten collaborative consultation descriptors in the definition, school personnel at S School didn't exactly team teach but combined their skills during reading time and grouped several classes. At the beginning of collaborative consultation, they were meeting on a regular basis to discuss students and teaching, but due to budget cuts they were no longer hiring a substitute for planning time. S School did more pullout and spent less time in the regular classroom than K School. The extent to which they were involved in all aspects of collaborative consultation is open to some interpretation.

5. Several factors such as administrator support, a team approach and preplanning influence the outcome of collaborative consultation, but these two specialists agree sufficient time is the biggest issue affecting success. It is clear from interviewing staff and reviewing meeting notes that collaborative consultation is not the perfect solution to meet the needs of special students. Time is the one major concern that came up again and again as people work on planning, and special student needs. Most teachers feel their days are full and unless there is some release time, collaborative consultation places additional demands on their time. Teachers surveyed complained about not having enough time to plan and to collect and organize information. They also complained about not having enough time given by instructional assistants and the speech/language specialist.

Conclusions

This research on collaborative consultation suggests five conclusions. (1) It is important that the special educator does not attempt to implement collaborative consultation without extensive support and commitment (Griffin, 1988; Little, 1990). (2) Adequate planning, individually and with peers on a continual basis, is the single most important ingredient for successful collaborative consultation. (3) Special educators need to know themselves well enough to decide if they are the type of person who will enjoy being part of a team, can be well organized, confident, flexible, positive, good communicators, and exercise sufficient leadership. (4) There are a variety of ways to develop collaborative consultation increases its potential for success by making it possible to adopt and adapt it to the preferences and needs of teachers and students at each school. (5) Allotting sufficient time for members of the team to plan, develop, and implement a quality collaborative consultation approach is the one factor that affects all other aspects of a successful program.

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